

# Residents of Omaha Briefed About Plan For Arkwood Site

By Ginger Shiras

Environmental Protection Agency officials told Omaha residents Monday night that Hallie Ormond of Harrison was blocking access to his contaminated Arkwood property in Northern Boone County.

They said they were considering court action against Ormond.

Ormond could not be reached for a response Tuesday morning.

The Arkwood site is one of 900 in the nation — 10 in Arkansas — designated as Superfund sites because of serious contamination that has spread to two wells and a spring near the Arkwood property.

The contamination at Arkwood is from cancer-causing pentachlorophenol, which was used to treat wood at Arkwood a half miles south of Omaha from 1962 to 1985.

Mass Merchandisers, which ran the operation for the final 12 years under a lease from Ormond and his son-in-law, C. C. "Bud" Grisham, has agreed to pay for a study under EPA supervision that would produce a plan for cleaning up the site.

EPA officials told the crowd of 50 at the Omaha School Cafeteria Monday night that Ormond was denying Mass Merchandisers and the EPA access to the site.

They said they expected to have access within four months and the study would then take 21 months.

After the study, a plan for cleaning up the site will be developed.

While the EPA is going through its long Superfund process, the state Pollution Control and Ecology Department has filed suit against Arkwood, Ormond, Grisham and

Mass Merchandisers, asking for a state court order forcing them to clean up the site.

A state lawyer said last summer that Mass Merchandisers' agreement with the EPA only involved the study, and the state wants a court order forcing all responsible parties to actually clean up the site.

Residents complained to the EPA officials Monday night about the minimum two-year wait before the clean-up begins.

Omaha Alderman John Parton said the city had already lost one industry. Asked after the meeting, he said the big Tyson Foods feed mill was planned for Omaha, but changed to Bergman after the pollution question was raised.

Mass Merchandisers is testing 10 wells, springs and run-off spots four times a year and Bob Barker, the company's Arkwood coordinator, told the crowd he would test private wells for anyone who asked. Two residents complained that he had tested their wells but they had not received the results.

Willie Tate, whose wife has had cancer twice in the last four years, said his well had been tested three or four times, but he had never been able to get the results.

Barker said he routinely took the results of the last test to the resident when he made a new test. He said he would give Tate the latest results today.

Rosa Birmingham said her own consultant had found her well highly contaminated before Mass Merchandisers dug her a new one and said her family had a long list of

health problems.

Ruth Izraeli of the EPA said the safe drinking water limit was one part of pentachlorophenol per million parts of water. A person drinking water contaminated at that level stands one chance in a million more than normal of contracting cancer, she said.

The water in Cricket Spring near the Arkwood site has four parts of pentachlorophenol per million, she said.

EPA records show that earlier samples found up to 97 parts per million of pentachlorophenol in Cricket Spring, 10.9 parts per million in runoff from the site, 5.6 parts per million in groundwater and 2.8 parts per million in surface water. They also found up to 30,000 parts per million in soil on contaminated areas of the Arkwood property.

Someone mentioned Monday night that fill from the Arkwood site had been used for school ball fields. Most who knew said the fill had come from an uncontaminated area and Izraeli said there were no signs that dirt-moving equipment had been used in the contaminated areas. However, Barker said Mass Merchandisers would test the ball field soil.

Two deep city wells have never shown any pentachlorophenol contamination.

Engineers for Mass Merchandisers say the water under the site moves northwest, while the Omaha wells are northeast of Arkwood. They say several home wells between the plant and the city well are

(See Omaha On Page 14)

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# Omaha

(Continued From Page 1)

not contaminated. They also say that contamination has been found only in a shallow aquifer, which is separated from the Omaha well by "several thick aquicludes."

Tate also told the meeting Monday night that Grisham had asked him to plow and seed at the Arkwood site. Izraeli said that would disturb the contaminated soil and the EPA would consider legal action to stop it.

The EPA officials had said at the beginning of the meeting that Ormond had already covered and seeded some contaminated areas.

Asked after the meeting, Izraeli said that was done last fall without the EPA's knowledge, but, while the cleanup might cost more, the covering would not impede the cleanup.

Also Monday night, the EPA officials told the local residents that local groups would be eligible next fall for \$50,000 federal grants to hire their own experts on Superfund sites.

They said records of the project would be kept at the Omaha School Library, and the public library and courthouse at Harrison.